

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: HENRY PESTANA  
INTERVIEWER: OLGA SPANDAGOS  
DATE: OCTOBER 26, 1985**

**O = OLGA  
H = HENRY**

**Tape 85.20**

O: This is October 26, 1985. My name is Olga Spandagos, and I'm here at 320 Main Street in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. I'm here to interview Henry Pestana. Okay. Henry, can you tell me where your parents were originally from?

H: Both parents and their families all originated in Madeira, Funchal, Madera, and that's over in the old country, about 500 miles from Portugal, Lisbon. And ah, when I went over there to trace the family, I did find some of my mother's family folks over there, but there's none of my father's. I couldn't locate them. But if you want a starting of this, when they came over from the old country in 1910, they came into Boston. And just as soon as they set in Boston, they got to come to Lowell to settle with their friends, some of them that had come ahead of them. And they moved to Tremont Street. There were the mills there, the Tremont Suffolk Mills there. My father was the insurance agent for the Metropolitan Life Insurance for about 12 - 15 years. But my mother was working across the street from Prince Street and Tremont Street, where the mills were. And my grandmother use to take care of me. Then I finally wound up going to the Green School, back when I was about four years old. That's because they had no babysitters at home, although my grandmother did take care of me after school. Then at the Green School I stayed there till I was about five years old. And then we moved. Oh, I just missed something there! I was born...

O: Well, we can always move back.

H: Yah, we were born on Charles Street, see. They went to Tremont Street, but then they moved to Charles Street for awhile. And I was born there, right on Charles Street where the Portuguese Club is right now, fifty six Charles Street.

O: Okay, can we just go back a little bit to when your parents were in Madeira?

H: Yah, I'll jump back, and I'll cut this first so that will fall in place.

O: You mentioned they came over in 1910. How did they come to decide to come to the United States?

H: How did they what?

O: How did they decide, what made them decide to come to the United States?

H: They had just got married, and they come back over here on their honeymoon.

O: They come, come as a trip to their honeymoon?

H: My mother was only sixteen then.

O: Did they intend to stay when they came?

H: Yes! Oh definitely, yah. They came here with their idea of staying here, because they had other, they had...he had an older brother and his mother was here already. His mother and the older brother were here and ah, they were living on Tremont Street. And they come in here and they wound up there. And ah, I'm trying to figure out the connection, the space between Tremont Street and Charles Street, because that's where I was born, Charles Street, in 1912.

O: They first came to Boston though?

H: Yah, they had to. That's where they landed. (Chuckles)

O: But they intended to come straight to Lowell?

H: Yah, cause that's where all the people were that they knew, their friends and relatives. And ah, I'm trying to figure out...there's a little drop there. My mother...my Father and my mother, they had to come to Charles Street first. That's where a lot of the Portuguese were, before they went to Tremont Street, because I was born on Charles Street. (O: Umhm) See, because that's what I can remember, my grandmother taking care of me for awhile. So I think you might have to go back. It don't hurt. I don't mind talking.

O: No, that's okay. I was just putting this a little louder. Um....

H: See, right when they come, and they come to Boston, then they arrived in Lowell among their friends, and some relatives, and wound up in Charles Street, which at that time I don't know if they called it Portuguese Broadway or not, but it was Back Central and Charles Street and Summer Street, that's where all the Portuguese immigrants were. And as of today, where I was born, 56 Charles Street, that is the Portuguese Club now.

They have the Holy Ghost and all that, that originates from there. So then, from there we moved to Tremont Street, and that's where my mother started working at the mills while my grandmother took care of me. And just as soon as I was old enough to get into the school, I went to Green School. I was about four years old then. And at the Green School we stayed there for, I stayed there for a couple of years I believe. And then we, we settled all around Lowell. There was Charles Street, Summer Street, and then we wound up in Ames Street, up in the upper part of Back Central Street. And then from there, back in 1918, we moved out here to Tewksbury.

But meanwhile, my mother was working there. And then there was one space of time there, where she did wind up in New Hampshire at the New Market Mills, where she used to tell me that she used to cross the street and set up her machinery, and get it all going. Then go home and do her washing and all, then come back and keep an eye on the machinery that she was working on, spooling yarn and all that.

O: So when your parents first came over did they both, your father and mother, go into the mills, or just your mother?

H: My father never worked in the mills. He ... well that I never inquired of him. I don't believe he did work in the mills, because he went into Metropolitan Life Insurance. And he was really the only one at that time that insured practically all the Portuguese people in Lowell. And where he spoke four or five different languages, he even had the Italians and the French insured, because when I was only about six, seven years old, I used to go with him. And especially towards Christmas time, I used to pass out the calendars from the Metropolitan Life Insurance to the people, you know. And he always bragged that I was going to be the next insurance agent at that time. [Chuckles]

O: So your father, did he know English when you first came to the United States?

H: Yes he picked up English on the ship. He was a cook on an English ship and he has been all over. He was in Africa and all over. That's when he picked up all his different languages. And when he come back here, as a matter of fact, at one time on Back Central Street, Tyler Street, there was a Chinese laundry there. And I went with him, and he had his stiff collars cleaned and whatever they do to them. And I got a kick out of him talking to the Chinese fellow there, you know. So that's another language. I don't know how good he spoke it, but he did make himself known to them. At that time these laundries where they use to do the collars and things, they could barely speak English, and he managed to get along there.

O: Now, so your father had a different option from your mother. Did she speak English at all?

H: Who?

O: Your mother? Did she speak...

H: Yes, she spoke broken English and did my father. And the funny part about it our whole family, we had, we wound up with eight in the family. And they, it was funny, my mother would speak to us in Portuguese, and we would answer in English. And ah, until the youngest ones, like my youngest sister there, she would speak English all the time. But the oldest of the family back at that time, we were about twelve or thirteen years old, we would always speak Portuguese to my mother. And we had difficulty trying to...we were kind of backward about talking English to her, cause we found that she had a little trouble explaining, but then she wound up breaking in the English language. And ah, she wound up at St. Joseph's Hospital as a nurse's aide there until she was seventy-seven. They tried to get her out at sixty five, and she said she didn't want to. So she stayed there, seventy-seven. They had two parties for her, one at sixty-five and one at seventy-seven. And then he said, "Hilda, you have to go." He says, "We can't keep people this long".

O: So when she first came over she worked, she went straight into the mills? (H: Oh yes) Did she go in there because she didn't speak the language, and it was the only thing available, the only job available?

H: Well outside of taking care of me as a baby she did work there and then with grandmother, or it was her mother-in-law, but it's my grandmother, was so handy, she took care of me until I went to school. And that was at kindergarten, at the Green School. So she used to work there. She worked there several years. And then she started moving around to different parts, because once my father had a good job I guess she quit working in the mill. Although she did wind up in New Market, New Hampshire. I can't seem to piece the time there. It must have been before I was born. It must have been about 1911. Because see, I was born in 1912 on Charles Street. So when she came back to the city, it was a little bit confusing, because there was quite a few times they were moving from one place to the other, but it was all around the city where the Portuguese immigrants were settled.

O: The neighborhood you lived in, you mentioned was mostly Portuguese. Were there any other ethnic groups living there in the neighborhood?

H: Well, I can take a lot...I know a lot of this, because I did work at the museum for four years, volunteer. Now at that time, we had what was known as Little Canada, and I found out that the French had settled ahead of other ethnic groups, because they were from Canada and they were closer to us. And they had a quite a group there. And then the Portuguese were in there. And I did notice there were alot of Polish immigrants that worked there at the mill with me, when I wound up at the mill eventually. And ah, you had over in Centerville, that was all Polish in there practically. And then you had the Highlands and the other section of Back Central up above, was all Irish immigrants living up in there. And you have proof of it still in existence. And the Greek settlement was there off of Market Street. And all you had to do was look around the city and see their churches. You had the Greek Church where the Greek settlement was, you had across the street there was the Irish, you got the church there. And on the upper part of Merrimack Street you have the French Church, and that's still there. And you'll still find

a lot of French people in them areas where the churches are. And the Polish are across the river on the Pawtucketville ... churches are still out there.

O: Um, can we please go back a little bit, back to your parents again?

H: Hm.

O: Just so we can talk a little bit about what it was like for them coming over. You mentioned they were from Madeira, and they came over on their honeymoon, and decided to stay here, right?

H: Yuh.

O: Now, how did they come over? I think it was probably by boat, right?

H: Naturally, yah. (O: Right) I got papers put away somewhere, but I can't find them now. Where, they who married them when they were over there, and the boat they came over here on. And I did, I ran across some photos up there where they were sworn in as natural citizens too. I have a picture about that big.

O: What was it like, their trip over here? Did they ever talk about it?

H: Well ah, she was busy raising a family. With eight children you know, she didn't have too much time to talk about anything else. We moved from Tremont Street. There was another street right next to it over near Cabot Street. I think they called it William Street, or something. That's where my brother was born. And then from there we moved... we moved about five different locations, because I remember four or five different schools that I went to. I went to the Elliot School up above the common. I went up there. And then there was a school on Charles Street. The Charles Street School I went to. I must have been in the first or second grade there, because then I wound up, there was a family moving to Ames Street, and that's where I wound up on a third grade school.

O: Can you talk a little about what it was like for you going to school, the schools you went to?

H: Yah, you want to just stop this for a second? I just... Yah, you could put that. (O: Okay) Yah, once my father got out of the insurance business he took a fling at restaurant business, and he started a small lunch place on Moody Street, which today I guess is Textile Avenue. And they called it Bon Ami Lunch, because it was in the French district. And he stayed there for some time. And then evidently he didn't make out too good. So he moved to Charles Street and set up a business there. And at that time it was Pestana's Lunch, and he was catering to the Portuguese and Irish that were all around that area. And then from there, he broke away from Lowell then and started to work in New York. He went to New York for awhile, but the family stayed here. We stayed here, well it's going on sixty-six years right here in Tewksbury now. So then I wound up getting old

enough to work. So I was working on a farm right here just three miles out of Lowell. I worked at the farm that's up here on Pike's. Pikey came from Vermont and he had a farm there, and he was really the only farmer that had rhubarb. And I can remember picking rhubarb there till I was about sixteen years old working on the farm. It was quite a thing there. And ah, from there I wound up going to the New Market Mills, and working at the New Market Mills.

O: What did you do there?

H: Right from the beginning, scrubbing floors on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. And then finally there was an opening. I got in at the weave room as a filling hand. And that's delivering all the yarn and filling for the top floor in the mill. That top floor had three hundred looms. That's right there on Market Street, the top floor. And I used to have to fill all of those what they called pinboards that held the yarn for the weavers, all the way down through that whole floor. There's 300, and I used to keep enough yarn there so that they wouldn't run out of yarn and keep the looms running. And it was a system that eventually you, you got down to a fine point so that you could control it and have time for yourself besides, because it was, if you didn't you'd have problems. You had to start with the first loom, and these pinboards had twenty-four bobbins on them, and they'd run eight hours, the whole pinboard. So you naturally don't give them a pinboard the first five minutes that you're in there. You wait and kind of stagger around and help the weavers keep going. And then when you start from the first loom, you give them a full pinboard probably a half an hour later, then you know it would still be running when you left on the next shift. And then you'd go down the line nice and slow, systematically, until you went through the whole three hundred. And you took a half a pinboard out of here and gave them a full one, and you'd put the half pinboard and you'd piece it up and make a full pinboard for the next weaver. And this was all different kinds of yarn. So you had to watch what you were doing, because they had all kinds of [unclear], and rayon, and acetates, and [unclear]. But the pinboards were marked with tickets on them. And this come down from the, what they call a quilling room. And I had two sisters working there in the quilling room

O: What's a quilling room?

H: Where they make those bobbins. They quill. They call it a quiller, where they fill the bobbin from before. And then I used to get my, all my yarn on a big high metal truck and take in the elevator, and take it up to the top floor. So that was, that was when I was a filling hand. And then I...

O: What year was that that you worked in the mills?

H: That would be thirty-nine. Let's see, thirty, thirty-five, 1935. Then from there I got into ah, battery hand. Yah, that was battery hand, but if you want to go back to the very beginning when they had the old looms there, it was very simple. Women were running only two looms, one in front and one in back. And they used to hand feed these bobbins into the shuttle. And of course they had to watch the bobbins so they wouldn't run out of

yarn. They'd stop them, take out and put in a full one, and that was done. But then they eventually started taking these old looms out just before the war broke out, and they were putting in all new looms, what they called high speed Draper Looms, or automatics, which had batteries on the side. And you put the bobbins, they held twenty-four bobbins on the battery, and it run through, and they were automatic. When the shuttle come back and forth, as long as there was yarn for the bobbin it would run, because they had devised a feeler system where the bobbin would run through the race way, and the feeler would push back as long as there was yarn in the bobbin. But when there was, the yarn was very low. The feeler would slip and that would trigger the mechanism on the other side. So that when the shuttle went back it was ready. This big steel spring would snap that bobbin in and push the empty one into the can, and you couldn't see it. If you didn't know what was going on, all you heard was click, click, and that bobbin was continuously running. And this way the weavers got to wind up with four, six, ten, and then twelve looms was the whole width of the mill. And after things got perfected real good, they got, oh at the end, about a couple of years later they were running forty-two looms. All you saw was three or four women in the whole weave room with three hundred looms, and you'd wonder who was watching all this and taking care of it. But they did have a battery hand, the girl that use to fill them. I got out of that job, that was too much for me. And I got down into the, what they called the drawing-in department, where I would bring up these big warps to put on the back of the looms when they ran out. See, these looms were running three shifts every day until Sunday. Saturday and Sunday they shut down. So they would run the cloth, eighty yards of cloth. Practically every shift would be turning out eighty yards of cloth. And these girls had to take these rolls of cloth off the loom, stop the machine, take it off, put on an empty shell they call it, or spindle, and start another eighty yards. And the way they could determine if the eighty yards of cloth was coming through, was as the yarn kept feeding into the loom, and the loom kept using up the yarn, there was brown chalk marks on the back of the warp that would come up and then they would watch for it. If they forget about it and it went through, they would have to stop the loom and pull that cloth all back to that mark before they cut the cloth, before they got eighty yards on there. So they had that...with that forty-two looms they had to keep watching them all. Besides the battery hand would kind of tip them off when the eighty yards of cloth was coming up. Now that's the job I had, was to take up the warps when the machine was stopped and it was finished. There was not enough yarn on it to run anymore cloth. Then I'd go up in there and I'd strip that empty spool, that big warp. I would put a big clamp on there. And you've got to remember that these looms were running nine, well seven, eight, nine thousands ends, and you put a clamp on there, and you had to clamp it so the ends wouldn't be over each other. You had a wooden big clamp about five feet long, and it had felt in it. You would put it on the yarn before you dismantled the warp and you would put a clamp right in the groove all even and tie it up. Then you would strip the back off, cut it, throw that back one side and put the full one in and you'd strip the full one. Take the paper off the big spool, take all the ends up, and put that on another clamp to correspond with the one that was running out. Then the fellow that was run the knot tying machine would come in with the machine, and he would brush out probably two thousand ends at a time and put it on the clamp on the machine, the knotting machine. And this was something new at the time, because they never could buy these machines for awhile. They used to rent out

of Rhode Island. And it was what they called BarberColeman outfit that had them. And these machines used to cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 and that's way back. So they use to rent them, and they had a meter on them. So that as much work as they got out of their machines, they paid accordingly for the use of the machine, until the mill got really going good, and then they bought out these machines and they had them for themselves. So that was quite a job, because you were getting paid \$.09 a thousand for tying these ends in.

O: So it was really piece work you were doing?

H: Yah it was. And you wouldn't believe it. When these looms were put back in the...when they were running on the loom, they would run sometimes four or five days, three shifts before they'd run out. And they were, these what they call warps were equipped with tickets; one ticket for every eighty yards that was on the spool. So when the spool came off that ticket would go with that cloth, and then the next ticket would come up. And then they knew accordingly how much more cloth they had left on there. Well by the time I had got out of that department they had taken the metal flanges off the side of the spool, they were on thread, and they had Lowell...What was the name of that place in Lowell? It was where they made metal spool, ah...oh, that outfit they called...you want to just stop it a minute? Yah, at Mueller's Foundry, they would make, turn out these big flanges to go back on those spools again, but they'd be two or three inches wider. So that they would put on two or three more days of weaving on there. And normally when they first started they were painted green. That's how we use to buy them. And they used to average probably about three hundred pounds. And you're handling it by yourself. You have a little two-wheel dolly that bounces. You would get that under the flange and catch the flange on the dolly. And then you grab the spindle on the other side and tip it up. And this, after you got use to it, it was nothing. And you'd push it down to the elevator and you go upstairs. This is all timed, because you're getting paid by what you're putting out. Well when that wound up with three hundred, four hundred. Then they eventually kept changing the sides on them until they got up to four hundred pounds. And you could feel the pressure in your ears when you picked one off the floor. If you didn't feel just right, you didn't feel like picking one off of the floor, it was so heavy. Of course you're only lifting one end, but there was still four hundred pounds and it had to balance precariously on a truck that had a little groove in it. And the flange would catch on it. And you'd get the other side and then you'd rush that up to the weave room. And you'd get it set up for the knotter that would tie it in, and then it was repetitious from then on. You know, the looms would run continuously, and then when they ran out of yarn they'd send the tickets down. They got pretty good at this, because the office would take... they had a tube system running all the way down to our department and they would take down the name, the number of the loom, type of cloth and yarn that they were making, and to replace with another warp corresponding to the same thing. And they would shoot it down the tube just like in a department store, and that would come all the way down to our department. And the boss down there would run it on a schedule. And then as we needed work, we'd take the jobs off that schedule and go up. So that nobody got ahead of each other in the weave room. If your loom ran out first, you had first chance to get a warp in there, see. And that's the way it went so that

everybody had an even break. They got so efficient there it was amazing. I don't know how they stopped, because I never saw a mill that had that efficiency running. There was everything in there.

O: And what mill was this?

H: The New Market.

O: New Market Mill.

H: If you had a loom that was running, and out of seven or nine thousand some of the ends broke, too many broke and the weaver, the weaver had no time to do it, because she was watching the other forty looms, or forty-two looms, they had a little arm on there with little squares of colors on it, red, green, yellow and black. If you wanted a smash piece, a smash piece is a girl that comes in there and ties weavers knots on those broken ends, and runs them through the heddle and the harness and puts them up in front, so that when the weaver starts again it will be repaired. And she's got to have it fixed so that it won't show too bad and spoil the cloth, otherwise you can't sell the cloth. So when they turned that signal up the foreman, or the second hand as they called them down there in the office, he had a glass window office where he could see, would send a smash piecer and take care of loom so and so. So the girl would go down and take care of that and then the weaver would be back in business again.

Then if it was something else mechanically on the loom, like the picker stick knocking the shuttle back and forth, and it wasn't working right, or operating right, he would put up the other color which would call for a loom fixer. And the second hand would send a loom fixer and investigate what the problem was. He would take care of that. And it was adjustments. Sometimes a collar that would throw the stick back and forth on the shuttle that goes across the raceway would wobble or vibrate, or the leather strap on the back was worn and wouldn't hit right so they'd have to change it. And it was quite a thing, because that weaving was all done with the picker stick, throwing the shuttle across and then throwing it back again. And ah, too bad this isn't in color, in film. What you had was a weave shed like this and the shuttle would run right through that. And then when the [cam] turned it, it come back this way. So you had that weaving motion in there, up and over, and over. And the way it was running, the weaver made sure that there was no bad work going through, otherwise you had to stop it. And if there was a bad spot on the cloth, she would have to stop it and we'd have to cut the threads on each side, which is... The cloth has what they call a salvage. It's a double thread on each side so to protect the cloth from being weak. So that when you take up the cloth, you'd have to take that salvage and go back and pick out each pick until she got to the bad spot, and then have to back up the loom for them [for picking]. She has have to count that and make sure she's going not too far back and not too far forward, otherwise when she starts it up she has a mark across that cloth, like two threads...two picks would be up too tight, or there'd be a space there. So she had to have that just right. And this is all, the machinery would take care of that, but she had to know what she was doing so that she'd have that running right. You want to stop for a second. [Tape is turned off, then on again] In other words you're working in there, that mill, you found that most of the people that did work in the New

Market were a lot of French, or Canadians as you call, French-Canadians. Then you had the Polish that worked in there. And then you had the Polish...the Portuguese and Greek people working there. There was, outstanding I think there was four different ethnic groups in there. There might have been some English or something, but they weren't regular employees, they were somebody, they were higher-ups. As a matter of fact they worked in the office. They had better jobs, but the people out for production was the French. Now the French really wound up as fixers on the looms, fixing looms, the mechanical part of that deal. I noticed a lot of them were French, and they were related. They were cousins, or they were fathers, or their sons that were working in there.

O: So a person helped the other get a job.

H: Oh yah. See they'd get one in on that job, and then they'd pass it along to the other. So that the family was tied right in with it. Then you had the Greek people were up in the weave room as weavers, and the Portuguese were weavers. And then between them there were weavers and battery hands, and sometime battery hands would be working in the Greek section. So that the battery hand could talk the Greek...to the women, the weavers sometimes, because they'd have difficulty talking, and that way they got along a lot better too. Eventually they all learned to talk good English to a certain extent, so that it carried over after. You had the... Let's see, the Polish were fixers too. And the French, and the Portuguese had, they wound up with some Portuguese secondhands. Where I worked, I worked for a Frank Lawrence and he was Portuguese, and he was the boss up there on the night shift, on the third shift. Then they had the second shift. There was another, I was there, I can't think of his name, but it will come to me. What you had here was different shifts. Now they had a staggering setup on shifts for our department. I'd would work one month on first shift, second month, second shift, third month, third shift. And it was amazing how the year would go by so fast, cause the next time you'd come back to the first shift, it would be spring, where you was working there in the wintertime on the first shift.

O: Everyone worked on shifts, even the weavers and...?

H: In our's, in our department we had it. I guess nobody wanted to stay one shift. They didn't want to...Well everybody would want to work the first shift, but see, so that way they'd split it up. So that you alternated and you worked the three shifts all the way through. Then you had a little more pay. It was something, I forgot what it was, how they...No, they done that so they didn't have to give you a differential on the pay. See, that way they didn't have to pay us extra for working nights. That's how they got around that. And then the weavers when they had the forty-two machines, they had that under control. They had speedometers. I'll call them speedometers. I've got one. It's a metal box that's attached on the back of the machine. And when she comes in, she's on the first shift. There's a clock on it with numbers three rows across of numbers. She would turn it to the first shift. And once the loom started that would slowly turn, and it would take one thousand picks to move it one number. And on top of that, her getting credit for that, they had a back-up system. So that if there was any had cloth ever went through to the cloth room, they could trace it back to who did it. Because on the first shift, there was an

office girl who would come in with a stamp. And before she started she'd stamp it first shift. And then the next time, second shift the same thing, second shift. All they had to do when they inspect the cloth in the cloth room, they could tell what shift that bad cloth would come from between the numbers. Then they would, if there was too much of that going on, you'd wind up having the boss take that cloth up in the weave room under fluorescent lighting at that time. The fluorescent lighting had just come in. It used to bother my eyes on the night shift. That's when I started to get bags under my eyes. Well anyway, they would call the weaver over while somebody was watching her machine, and they'd run the cloth and show the bad cloth. And lots of times I used to see the women come back crying, you know. They'd kind of...well they'd not threaten them, but give them a pep talk about the job wasn't that good. If they kept doing that, they'd be out, out on the street. And that's how they kept that under control. So the weaver was under pressure all the time. She couldn't turn out bad cloth, because then it would reflect back to her. But meters were running first, second and third shift. And there was colors on them. So that if somebody didn't recognize the number, they could tell by the color. There was a red, green, and a black. And they'd turn the key on there to get credit, because at the end of the week you had an office girl come after the machines were all stopped on Saturday morning. She'd come in with a clipboard and the names of the weavers and everything on it. And she'd take down the pick readings. She would write down according to the weaver, the the pick readings on that number. And she would do it to the whole...all the way through the room, the whole three hundred looms. And each weaver had those forty-two looms were marked on there. And then in the office they would check it off, and the piece work would come into play as they summed up the amount of production they put out. That's how the weavers were getting paid, with that clock.

O: You mentioned that the office people were of English decent?

H: Oh yah. There was ... We had Walter Gallant was our agent, and he came out of New Market, New Hampshire where they originated, and they come into Lowell. Walter B. Gallant, and then he had a brother-in-law that was working there and he was a top secondhand. And he was Gallant. His name was Gallant too. There was a couple more, but I didn't get into it. But ah, and then at the employment agency there was quite a guy there. He was quite a crackerjack. And that was... he [unclear]. He was quite a man, Paul, Paul, P. T. Whittier. Paul Whittier. You could go in there and apply for a job in the spring, and then he'd say, "I'll keep you in ..."

#### **TAPE 1, SIDE A ENDS**

#### **TAPE 1, SIDE B BEGINS**

O: So okay, back to the mills. You mentioned that there were a lot of different ethnic groups. Was there ever rivalry there between the groups that worked in the mills?

H: No, no, everybody that got a job, if you got in there as a weaver, you stuck with it until you quit the job, or if you...well you did have a step system there. If you was...if

you wanted to be a loom fixer in the mill, you wound up oiling, oiling the machinery and cleaning the machines with...take that lint off the back of the machines. And if you stayed there long enough you got acquainted with the, and familiar with the machinery and everything. That way you could step up into another job if there was a vacancy and they needed a fixer. Then you got into a job like that. The same with the battery hand. She would be battery hand, and she got used to working with the machinery. And sometime she'd help the weaver out. And then if she was real interested in being a weaver, sometime she'd help the weaver running the machines. And then if the weaver was out sick or something, or quit the job, she could step into that place and take that job. So that was good too.

O: But did it take many years for one person ... ?

H: No, that could happen probably within six months, because sometimes a year or six months, because some of these women who were in there were elderly that were working there. Some of them...well roughly thinking now, I would say they were in their forties and fifties working, because there were no young...the young girls there wound up by being battery hands. You know what I mean? They started in just like going to school, going to first grade, and second grade. It worked up that way, step by step. And sometimes I think there was a little conflicts on the job. If someone got a job, a battery hand got a weaver's job, if somebody was looking for it and they were there a little longer, but if it wasn't in her area, it would be settled so that they had their own job. That's how they advanced, by working with the weaver and doing the...working in the machinery, and this way they weren't fresh at it. And unconsciously, not unconsciously, but they got to a point where running the looms, they were running oh, about a hundred and twenty-five picks per minute. And that means the raceways or the shuttles were throwing one thread in at a time. That's a pick, then they kept changing the gears, hanging the gears. After the women had forty two machines they started changing the gears and speeding it up. A weaver would take the handle of a machine you know, and pull it back and stop it, and it would throw a pick, but after awhile she couldn't do that. It was so fast. You'd pull a handle and it would go (makes sound). Some of the women were afraid to start it up unless they were there long enough to get acquainted with the machinery. And once you started it up it would be bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. You couldn't see the shuttle. You couldn't even see the shuttle going through the raceway along ah, between the picker stick hitting one on one side in back of there. And then when they start, what they called doffing, changing the empty bobbin into a full one, when that knocks it in you heard click, click, and that's it. You take a stranger and show him that and he wouldn't know what's going on. You could hear the noise, and if you explained what was going on, he might watch for it, then he could see the way the weaving was going through. And another thing about the weave, the looms, at one time there were just a simple weave which was probably four harness and sometimes six harness, which would control the weave, so many threads going across the warp. Now when they wound up sometimes they were ten twenty harnesses, and that means there were ten to twenty different manipulations where the threads were woven different, you know, but they were still being woven one under, one under, or two under, one over. And this ah...[unclear] twenty, and you can imagine the problem when a

broken end came out, you had ... I still have them here, somewhere in my tool box, what they called a reed hook. They had to be about that long to put through the little eye, and find where the thread was, and trace it way back, and get it way up in the front and draw that, tie it with [unclear], draw it through. You draw through the harness, draw it through the reed, which was to an ordinary person it looked like a piece of flat metal. But that reed had 9,000 slits in it, because each slit took care of one end coming through. And you had to draw it through. You had to run your finger over it, because...it was pliable. It was about probably three to four inches high. And you could run your nail on it...fingers on it, and find where it was missing and draw it through. And then once you started you could tell if it was in the right place, otherwise the thread would be two here and one there, see. All your warp ends is everything that is running lengthwise of your cloth, and the filling is what's tying in the warp ends. So that was kind of a little complicated till you got used to it and see what was going on.

O: How long did you usually work? Was it eight hours a day?

H: Eight hours a day, that's right. You got in there and we'd be punching the clock. You had cards there to punch. And then you'd go to the...I went to my department and got my work. And once you started going, and that's it. You would put one warp in up in the weave room, you'd go right back down with the empty beam, and they'd take it into the slasher room where they make up the warps, and you'd go in for another job. And you average probably, oh, probably four to five jobs in eight hours, because this entails getting the...finding the warp that's laying on the floor on the stock pile, picking it up, getting it on the truck, taking it on the elevator, going up to your destination in the weave room where you knew where the numbers were, because they all run in rotation. You go in there and if the loom happened to be loom 300, you went to that loom and you stripped it, and you'd put that one in. And then you went to the partner, you worked in partners. One ran the machine tying the warps in, and the other was a rigger. That's how I started, rigging, and that's doing the heavy work, putting in the warps. You'd give him the ticket and say, there's your next job. So that once you got that tied, he'd move to the next job. Then I would have to go back to where he finished and take all his work off the clamp. It's a whole row, nine thousands knots all in a row, and roll the warp back nice and slowly, and take up the slack, because they'd be slack there where you had the tie up. Then I'd get in the front and I would pull it very easy and get all those knots coming through. And you'd have to shake the harness very easy to get those knots through. If you're too rough some of them knots might let go, and you'd have a lot of loose or broken ends. Once then once you get it through, and get it all done, and if there was some ends broken, the fixer...secondhand would call out the smash piecer and she would check the warp before the weaver got a hold of it, and she would get it into position. And then there was two or three steps there where the smash piecer would put in any ends that were broken, the loom fixer would come in and check the shuttle to see if they were in operating condition, they weren't worn out or anything cause it wouldn't take much to throw them off, because the machine would run so fast. A picker stick that throws that shuttle across, if there was a fraction out of the way, that would shoot through. Instead of going through the trough, it'd bounce off and go through there. And if there was any splinter on the side it would tear hundred and thousands of ends off. As a matter of fact,

that machine would be stopped all day trying to repair it. So I've seen sometimes where they, the picker stick would slap those shuttles back and forth. And especially on the outside row facing Market Street, it would shoot across the cloth, and through the window and out into the street, which was four floors up. (Laughs) So they used to have to put screens near the bottom of the glass to protect, to make sure that nobody would come after them if the shuttle hit someone down there, because those shuttles have that steel point on them, and they were going and they're heavy. Them shuttles were pretty heavy. They are made of a hard mahogany wood. So they could take an awful lot of punishment.

O: So what was the pay like? Was it good pay, or?

H: Well, when I started there as a battery hand... I have my time book upstairs. I got to bring it down. Do you want to just stop it a minute? (O: Sure) When I was just getting started in the weaving department, I did start and I was getting \$6.50 a week, and that was just supplying the weavers with yarn. And it was an eight hour job. And my job was to make the weavers have enough yarn on their machines to keep them going for the whole eight hours. And you had three hundred looms. I had the top floor, which was three hundred looms, and I used to have to go down to the cooling room and get that yarn and bring it up. And then I would piece up what they called a pin board, which had twenty four bobbins on it, which is equivalent to eight hours work for a machine to use. Now if these pin boards were running out, I would give them enough bobbins to keep them going for about a half an hour, till I got everything set up for the day. Then I would start with the number one loom and give them a full pin board, which would be good for eight hours, that way they would not run out of yarn the time going home, at the end of the day. So that it would give time for the next shift to take over and do the same thing. So I would...by the time I go down to the three hundred looms, I would have them all with enough yarn for the eight hours. Then I would have to go down back to the quilling room and get enough supplies for the next shift, and I'd keep it on the floor handy. Or if they happened to change a style in the cloth I would have to get a different yarn and change on the wheel. Like they had a (Celonese, or Seraceda [sp?]), you would have to change the yarn. That's when a cut or a eighty yard cloth came up, then they would change. See, they couldn't change in a middle of a roll of cloth. See, they would have to change at the end of the cloth. So that as you put in the new style, or the new material, sometimes it was a very very flat milky white cloth that they were producing, and that was quite a thing. And ah, they would cut the cloth and they would start it fresh. And I would give them a pin board with fresh filling, which would give that style of cloth, cause all that cloth was coming out in style numbers. They had style numbers on them and that was going out. So as a battery hand I was getting \$6.50 a week. And then I wound up going into battery hand. I wanted to get my foot into the weaving department permanent. So I got into battery hand and I went up to \$9.70 a week. And that was putting the bobbins into the batteries that were automatic. And these batteries run constantly and it was set up on a trip mechanism on the loom. So that as the bobbin kept feeding through the race way on the cloth, as it got down to bare bobbin it would trigger off a little feeler. That this come up later on in the years. It would trigger off the feelers that would slip, and that slip would start the mechanism on the opposite end of the loom.

So that by the time the shuttle got back to the loom it would snap a full bobbin in and these shuttles opened. There's no top or bottom to them. It would just push that full bobbin down and at the same time knock the empty one out, and it would just continuously run. The loom would not stop, and that way, unless there was a malfunction, but if there was no malfunction there, it would continuously run all day long. The weaver would have no problem. She could concentrate on any other problem she had in the floor where she had the other looms running. Then after, oh I believe I stayed at the weave room department there for something, about a year and a half before I moved down into the drawing in department, which was a higher paying job. And was bringing up the warps that go on the back of the looms, and ah, supply the weaver with the cloth as they're weaving. So that was a piece work job. Now there was one funny thing about this company that was so efficient. Once they got wind of the union marching out in the streets and trying to pass fliers to the weavers to have them join the union, they would always be one step ahead of the union. At the end of the week you'd notice on the bulletin board there would be a notice that they decided to give us a 5% raise, exactly what the union was peddling out in the streets for the weavers to join the union. So the weavers had no need of joining the union if they were going to get what the union was promising, unless they offered more. So the mill kept going ahead of the union that way, and they kept the union out until it got to a point where the only way you could force a union in, is when the help had grievances. Then the company couldn't quite offset the grievances. And that's when the union tried to step in and say, "We will straighten, correct grievances." If the work load is too heavy, or there was...the conditions weren't right, we will correct that once you get the union there. And that's when the company put in enough [unclear]. "You put a union in here we will close the shop." And that's exactly what they done. By the time the union was ready to step in, the weave room shut down. And that was back about 1940 some odd ... 40 ... Well I was in the service then, and my job was promised when I come back out. When I come back out they had eliminated my job, and they had tied it in to a loom fixer's job. So the loom fixer was doing two jobs under the patriotic system that they called it. "We're short of help. You're going to help the country win the war. Do that job too, we can get the help." And what happened when we come back, the service men did not have their job. They offered you a job that was not paying as much. And that's when I decided to leave that place and I didn't go back. I got into another job.

O: And what did you go into?

H: Hm? I worked at G.E. wiring. They were communication wire. And that was back in 1945 I got in there, because I was an early... When I got out of the service I was early on account of the family, having five in the family, in the service, and I got out on the hardship case. So that took care of that.

O: Okay.

H: It was the system that was really kind of tricky. The weave room, when the weavers had ... There was ah ... I'll tell you how some of the grievances come up sometime. With the cloth coming up through the back, that warp started down and they called it the

slasher department. It goes back, way back into a room where they have big big frames with spools on them. It was nine thousand warp that you were going to send up the weave room. You put nine thousand spools up on the ... It took care of the whole room. It was an iron steel frame with spindles, and you put these on. And the girls would run that through onto a machine that would run that spool and pull all those ends nice and straight. It went right through reeds so that the threads were wrapped all even. They're all even on there. And they'd run it. And the cloth, they would tell them just how far to run it. And they'd run it as much as they could put on. And then from there that yarn is dry, because it comes off a spool. That would go down to the slasher room. They called it slasher, because that's where it would run in the back of the machine and go through a size, a starch. It's a liquid that would penetrate the yarn as it's going through, and then dry it up back again on the warp. And that would give it what they called tensil strength. The thread would be stronger. It wouldn't chafe. And it had, oh ah, well starchy, cause you've noticed, sometime if you buy... That ain't running. (O: Yes) That is running? Oh. (He means the tape). Cause you'll notice when you buy cloth, well if you buy it in the store, I think it's been treated, but if you would buy it right from the mill factory, you'll find that as you wash it, the starch will come out of the cloth, and you'll find the cloth is much more pliable and soft. Stop that a minute.

And 1918 we moved out of Lowell to Tewksbury, which is only two or three miles out of town, and that's when I started working at the New Market. After well, I didn't at the time, I was too young. I worked on the farm. Matter of fact, both me and my brother worked on the farm near by. And we worked there until we were twelve to fourteen years old. And at that time we were going to school. And ah, well most of us were going to school, there was five or six of us. And ah, the way things were set up, we had a trolley that used to run out of Lowell. They called it the Boston Elevator, and it used to go all the way into Tewksbury, Reading, Wakefield, Melrose and Everett Station. It used to run out that way. Well that same trolley that came out of Lowell to Boston, we used to have to ride that bus, that trolley, into Lowell or to school. We used to take it and ride that trolley to school. And they used to give us tickets at school and then ah, we used to ah, get reimbursed. We paid fifty cents for the ticket, and then they would give us the fifty cents back when we brought in the ticket all punched out. And that gave us ten rides, which was five days of school, see. That's the way they had it all figured out. And the town would pick up the tab on that and take care of the transportation.

Well we worked on the farm until we were old enough to work outside the farm. That's when I went into the New Market, back in the... well I went in the New Market right after thirty three. 1933 I went into the C.C.'s. I got out of the farming and went into the C.C.'s and worked there. Plus when I got out of there, worked on the W.P.A. and E.R.A., W.P.A. and there was so many of those initials you couldn't keep up with them. But they were all different jobs to keep the family going at the time the depression was on, and a lot of work wasn't available. And with eight of us in the house we had to do it that way. At that time my father had to get a job out in New York. He worked out in New York on the road construction. He worked out there at the Merit Highway, Merit Parkway through Connecticut, into White Plains, New York. And during the summer where I didn't have to be old enough, I went with him and I worked as a water boy on highway. Then that same year I come back, because I couldn't stay there, cause I was supposed to

go to school. [Coughs] So I worked on the farm, which didn't apply. And then part time in evening classes I'd go to Lowell Textile. And that's where I started taking up weaving, textile weaving, and designing, and whatever they had there. And they had a weave room down in the Lowell Textile they called Cumnock Hall, that yellow building. They had a whole floor there that was all looms. And one loom there that I was really interested in, they show you where they were explaining how intricate everything was on the machinery. At that time they were introducing what they call chains that ran along the loom almost like a computer. It would do the same thing. It would control the harness. These little wheels would lift up harnesses and drop them back. And that would have affect on the cloth that was coming through in such a way that they had one display loom running that was making ribbons, oh about six inches wide on the warp, making a whole row of ribbons. And they had little small shuttles, very tiny shuttles with different colored yarn in the shuttles. And they were so...well the way you had a design, it was printing on the printing mind you, being woven, Cumnock Hall, on the cloth, yellow building. Even up to the American flag on the top of the building, with the red, white colors on the flag, all in ribbons. And these little shuttles would change and would run in there, and you'd get that design almost like that there right on the cloth. Yah, I stayed and took that, the weaving and designing then. And that's when I got interested in the... working in the Textile mill. And then I got away from the farm. I worked on that until I went into the service. Then from the service I got into the General Electric when I got out and discharged.

O: Umhm. [Taped turned off then on again. Interview resumes]

H: They called a shuttle box, they had a place where sometimes you had two shuttles, and the picket stick would hit that one, and that one would stay there because it was up too high. It wouldn't reach. And that's when they changed colors. Sometimes you have a blue bobbin here, a red bobbin here, or a white bobbin, and that's what you call a two-shuttle box. But on the Lowell Textile they had four, they had four shuttles, and the shuttles were only about that big. They were only about that big. And I have a spool in there, and the yarns on it. And they would send them across, and the two picket sticks, they were side by side together. They would alternate, and two on this side changing, so you had four different variations going.

O: Umhm.

H: And where they only had back and forth here, you had this one will go, that one will go coming back, this one will go this way, and that will come back. Meanwhile they were changing colors, because them bobbins that there was, the shuttles [unclear] had different colored yarns on them. And it was just like a picture. You saw the picture by the Lowell Textile building right on that ribbon, the cloth. It was probably not quite as wide as that.

O: Umhm.

H: You'd see the whole building, Cumnock Hall, you'd recognize it. It was just like a photograph on the cloth. Yah, they had everything. And then you had advanced in

weaving, what they called Jackard Looms, that was a number two mill. They didn't have chains to control things. What they had was big cardboard sheets, oh about three times that size. Very hard cardboard. Not quite as thick as this book, with holes punched in it. And that would operate on a book all folded, and the pages would drop down to the loom and control the loom like it would a player piano. It would create... Well over there, they made cloth over there with beautiful silk, had Indian faces printed right on the cloth, woven into the cloth. It wasn't stamped, it was woven, and you turned the other side, it was black silk, but on this side it was white and black to give you the outline of the face, Indian faces. And a lot of this fancy stuff was going into fur coats for lining, very fancy fur coats. And then you had looms there that they made casket lining. It wove so fast and so cheap, it was like this, just enough to hold the yarn. It was just like water just running right down, because that's what they use to put in the coffins. They didn't need any wear and tear on that, it was just for dress.

O: Umhm.

H: So they use to make that too down there. Then they had the little looms over on the other side on the second floor. Ah, the girl that's over here now from Florida, she used to work in the weave room, in battery hand. She used to work like anything putting them bobbins in. They made cloth about that wide. I forgot what the name of that loom was. It was a smaller loom. It wasn't as good. The ones where we were, we had looms here about from here to that wall. They were big powerful looms. They were very expensive. They went to make them today, it can cost you over two or three thousand dollars to make a machine like that, more than that probably. So you had different types of cloth, Celonese, Rayon, Acetate, and they used to print, well, heavy cloth on these curtains. But they were, well I forget where I would see that. I would see it probably in pillows cases for some of it, or some fancy cloth, bed sheets probably, if they... I guess I've never seen it around, but that was something like that, bed sheets. Um, you it's funny, I never kept track of it, where it went, because it was always shipped out. And ah, yah, when I come back out of the service, after I got out of the G.E., I went over to Mass Mohair and I worked there on the wool. And they were beautiful cloth there. They made upholstery for couches and stuff. And where they wove over there, instead of having two...a warp running through the loom, they had two of them running through the loom. This one was a dummy. It would run through to keep the yarn from being flat. it would be lumpy all the way through. Then when the cloth was done, they put it in another machine in another room, and they would strip it, tear the tope layer right out while the cloth went through, and it would leave loops, and them loops is what gives you ... I don't know if I have a piece of cloth here that ... Well it might, it might do something like this. A little higher than this. You see this? [Showing a piece of cloth]

O: It's to give it texture?

H: The higher is nylon, then I worked on a machine, they'd run the back of this through latex rubber.

O: Hm.

H: To hold the loops from coming out. The other machine would pull the layer out that was in here so it wouldn't be solid, and would pull it out and give you that...that ah... what would they call that now? There's a name. I have cloth here from the company. Oh weaving was quite a thing. I haven't got any here now though. As a matter of fact, we had fabric we were making one time that went to Hollywood for curtains on the stage. Beautiful! And that's when they first came out with metallic in the yarn. You remember that?

O: No.

H: Brass and silver in the cloth?

O: I think I know what you mean.

H: They had little diamonds in black, black cloth, brassy colored. Some of them were silver. And then they had the ones with figure eight brass all woven in, all figure eights. Because I brought a sample of that home one time. A matter of fact I had remnants left over and I had a couch made, covered with that. That was quite a thing there. But that Mass Mohair was a heavier cloth, it was a very heavy cloth, because they use to make upholstery for automobiles. When I was there we made ah, not... yah, upholstery cover cloth for the Dodge people and the Cadillac people. A heavy nylon, nice, hard, that you see on the car, it's nylon like that. And then in the Cadillac it was black cloth with those little silver diamonds in the cloth. It was cloth, soft cloth. And ah, I had a piece of that on my old car not too long ago. But that Jacquard Loom was quite a thing. It had, I bet you, close to I'd say two to three hundred pounds of iron hanging over your machine holding those books. They were to drop down one page at a time. And as probably twenty pages got down, the other ones would be going up and come down again. And they were doing the holes that these little wheels were doing on the other machines, that would lift up on weaving. Each harness has ... I don't know if you know, it's got a bar that pulls the harness up and the other one pulls it down. You never probably...

O: I don't think I've seen these.

H: Steel on each end, and they pull up the harness and they drop the harness down. I forgot what they called that. Ah, they would do the same thing only it would be, the holes would do it, and it would change all the harness. So that you could print, you could write a letter, you could write a message right on the cloth, cause that's the way it was. The cards ... Wannalancit still had some in the back room. I think they got rid of it at that time when I was there at the museum. They were getting rid of a lot of that, because that was a Jacquard. It had the same effect that a player piano had, you know, the rolls with the little holes in it.

O: Umhm.

H: Only it was doing it with metal, cause these cards were hard, and they would release the fingers. There was little fingers that would release them up and it would drop the thing down. And instead of harness ... So where they got that effect, all the threads were hanging individual on them little wires, all the wires all hanging and they would be pulling them up and down like that. Instead of the harness that had a whole row of wires on the control that all went up and down, these would all go down by themselves according to them holes on it. That's where they got that printing. See, so I can explain it to ya, cause ah, you know, it's rubbed off on me. I've seen all this.

Working in the weave department did teach me a lot about efficiency, how to work among machines and things, cause I wound up working places where you had to have efficiency. And where production was tops on anything, you had to produce. Today, people have jobs that they don't really produce. They know things, but when it comes to producing it, production, I don't see how they do it. I mean the companies, of course electronics and all that has a different way of producing that you don't see, it isn't visible like it is when you're producing cloth. And then they sell so much cloth to keep ahead of, to pay the wages to the workers and all that. And it goes the same with, applies to working on the farm. You worked on the farm as long as you produced material to sell, then you got your wages, all that tied in. And the same at the G.E. where we ran wire, communication wire for the end of the war effort. Ah, this of course the government was paying for, so there wasn't quite so tight on production. I mean on efficiency. But this all applies to learning. And ah, I wound up, one of my last jobs I wound up as ah, up in Andover where we worked on presses and we made hockey pucks, skate [unclear] and ah, gaskets, anything that was made out of rubber, we made for cars and things. And that was all production, cause you're machinery was all synchronized. And you had so much tickets that they passed out that you had to produce. So that came out that way. So I dropped all that work out, and I wrapped up my, rest of my working days at the school system. And I got into the Tewksbury school system and ah, which was a very easy job compared to working in the production. All you done is swept out classrooms, and straightened out the classrooms after the children have left the school. And ah, then the summer time you straighten out the school. You painted classrooms, or you changed the furniture in the classroom. And ah, it was fourteen years there that I put in at two different schools. And then I finally retired from there.

**Interview ends**

**JW**